

Slain Exiles Hoped To Stop 'Betrayal'?

By DON BOHNING
Of Our Latin America Staff

Exile leader Felipe Vidal Santiago and three companions, whose executions were announced by the Castro regime, died attempting to prevent "another betrayal of the Cuban people" Vidal's organization said here Thursday.

Humberto Nunez, secretary-general of the United Front of National Liberation (FULN), said Vidal, 38, and the other three exiles — identified as Ladislao Gonzales Benitez, Elias Rivera Bello and Alfredo Valdes Linares — had been in Cuba since March 14.

The Cuban government announced early Thursday the men were captured off the north coast of Las Villas Province, convicted by a Habana Fortress War Crimes Board, their appeals denied and their execution ordered. The announcement did not say when the men were captured.

The Castro government accused the men of being agents of the Central Intelligence Agency under the orders of Manuel Ray, leader of the exile organization Revolutionary Junta (JURE).

Nunez said the charge was "absolutely false" and that Vidal was "totally disconnected" with the CIA or JURE. A JURE spokesman also denied

the men had any ties with Ray.

Vidal's mission, Nunez claimed, "was to expose and block a plan by the Cuban Communist Old Guard — led by Blas Roca, Lazaro Pena and Juan Marinello — who, with leaders of the false opposition were to organize a Communist coalition government."

Under the scheme, claimed Nunez, the Cuban government would be given a "new look" in the U.S., with Castro and his followers out but the quasi-Socialist regime continued. He didn't say how Vidal planned to block it.

The Cuban government announcement said that the four exiles had embarked for Cuba from Key Biscayne. It said they stopped briefly at Anguilla Key in the Bahamas.

The announcement said Cuban fishermen saw the group, and notified the Coast Guard. The men threw their weapons overboard, including a 20 millimeter cannon, when they realized they would be captured, the announcement said.

Vidal was a naval attaché in the Cuban Embassy in Venezuela in the early days of the Castro government. He defected in 1960.

Vidal was one of some 30 exiles restricted to the Miami area by the U.S. Immigration Service in 1963. Nunez claimed, "constant pressure was maintained against all activities of Vidal and our organization."

Vidal was described as the "military coordinator" and "secretary" of the FULN, which was organized about a year ago.

He lived in Miami at 2271 NW Seventh St., with his wife Raquel and four children, the oldest 11 and the youngest 5 months.

Another of the executed, Rivera Bello, was identified as a former employee of the Inalambrica Telegraph Co. in Havana.

It was reported he still be in Cuba.



Vidal Santiago
... lived in Miami

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